Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Framework

Scale Toolkit

The contents and templates included in this toolkit were developed in collaboration with Better Purpose. For more information, please visit www.betterpurpose.co

Collaborate. Innovate. Educate.

GLOBAL SCHOOLS FORUM

WHAT IS IT?

Photo: Hippocampus

Imagine a **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Framework** as the **project's navigation system.**

It provides you with the means to continuously **check your direction**, **measure your distance**, and **understand the terrain ahead**.

It is a comprehensive plan that helps ensure that your project is performing effectively and offers the tools to adjust your course based on the insights you gain. This strategic instrument not only **guides you towards your destination but also enhances the journey, making every step more insightful and impactful.**

Photo: Hippocampus

A MEL Framework is a systematic approach to tracking a project's progress (Monitoring), understand its impact (Evaluation), and use those insights to improve your implementation and future initiatives (Learning).

1. Monitoring:

Monitoring is keeping a regular check on the project to make sure everything is going as planned and why.

2. Evaluation:

Evaluation is looking at how well the project is doing at certain milestones, or how it did after it has finished.

3. Learning:

Learning means using information from monitoring and evaluation to make better decisions now and in the future.

GLOBAL SCHOOLS FORUM

✓ **Make a better project –** Monitoring acts as a tool, a dialogue with the project that helps pinpoint and enact valuable improvements and refinements. Monitoring does this by setting formal moments for the team to stop, focus on important questions, gather data, discuss the answers, and then adjust the project if needed. In short, monitoring is as a back-and-forth conversation that guides the project's choices; it's not just something you do alongside the project, it's part of the project itself.

✓ **Learning -** Monitoring can lead to different types of learning. Questions asked during monitoring can push the team to look closer at their work, helping them figure out if a certain method is working. The data gathered can also help in later evaluations of the project.

✓ **Being accountable -** Any requirements for reporting should be considered when setting up the monitoring system. This way, the data you collect will help with reporting later on.
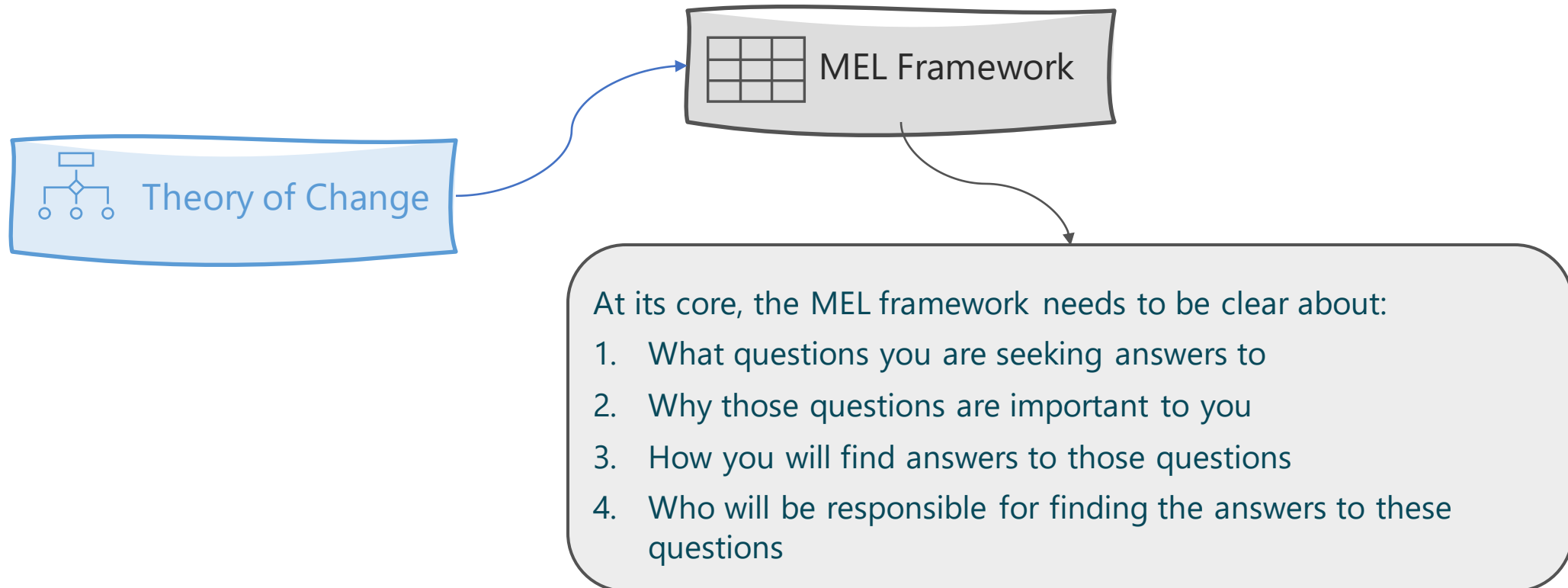
Your MEL Framework will be useful in assessing all components of the DVF framework - desirability, feasibility and viability. Here's how:

1. **Desirability:** is the innovation engaging the intended audience and having the intended impact on outcomes? Monitoring the activities, evaluating impact on key outcomes, and implementing learning from these will ensure to improve desirability of the innovation.

2. **Feasibility:** is there the culture and leadership to use data and learning, and does the team have the skills to implement the MEL framework? This allows us to ensure that we are developing a foundation of evidence-based decision-making.

3. **Viability:** is the system in place to deliver MEL as the innovation scales (i.e., are we developing data maturity)? MEL systems should be built with the viability of implementation and scale in mind.

HOW TO DEVELOP A MEL FRAMEWORK

The starting point for developing a comprehensive MEL framework should always be your **Theory of Change***, as it represents the foundation for your framework.

Theory of Change → MEL Framework

At its core, the MEL framework needs to be clear about:

1. What questions you are seeking answers to

2. Why those questions are important to you

3. How you will find answers to those questions

4. Who will be responsible for finding the answers to these questions

*If you have not yet developed a ToC, we recommend that you check out the chapter on ToC Development and return to the MEL Framework after!

HOW TO DEVELOP A MEL FRAMEWORK

You can build your MEL framework one step at a time.

Step 8: Who will be responsible for answer each question?

Step 6: For each question, how will you know if you are successful?

Step 4: What would good look like for each question?

Step 7: When & how often will you need to ask each question?

Step 2: What monitoring questions are important?

Step 5: Where will you find the data to answer each question?

Step 3: Why is each of the questions important to you?

Step 1: Which components of your theory of change do you need to reflect on?

The next page defines each of these steps in more detail.

COMPONENTS OF A MEL FRAMEWORK

1. **Theory of Change (ToC):** This is the basis of your MEL Framework. It outlines how your organisation or project plans to achieve its goals and brings about change.

2. **Monitoring Questions:** We must identify what it is within our programme that we want to reflect on. It is likely that you will have lots of questions! List them all out so you can decide which are highest priority later.

3. **Purpose:** For each monitoring question, we need to understand why we are asking it. What is its relevance to our project or programme?

4. **Success Criteria:** This defines what success looks like for each question of focus. It's the standard against which we measure our progress for each question.

5. **Data sources:** This refers to where we can find the information needed to answer our monitoring questions. These could be assessments, surveys, interviews, reports, or even observations.

6. **Indicators:** This refers to precisely what evidence we will extract from our data sources to assess against our success criteria. These may be quantitative or qualitative in nature, but they must be measurable.

7. **Frequency:** This refers to how often and until when we will need to collect evidence regarding this specific question.

8. **Owner:** This refers to who will be responsible for ensuring that evidence is gathered to answer this specific question, according to the plan outlined in the MEL framework.

HOW TO DEVELOP A MEL FRAMEWORK

While there are many ways to develop a MEL Framework, here is one template to get you started. The easiest way to create one is with a spreadsheet, outlining these components in the columns, linked to each element of your Theory of Change.

Theory of Change	Monitoring Questions	Purpose / Rationale	Success Criteria	Data Sources	Indicators	Timing / Frequency	Owner
Link to the ToC	What do we want to reflect upon?	Why are we asking this question?	What are we aiming for? What does 'success' look like in this area?	Where will we look for data/information that helps us answer the question?	Precisely what will we look at, within the data sources? The indicators may be qualitative but should be measurable	How often should this data be collected?	Who is responsible for collecting and/or analysing this data?
Activities and Mechanisms for Change							
Enabling Factors							
Short-Term Outcomes							
Medium-Term Goals							

The ToC directly shapes the MEL framework

It is likely that the most important components will need to be prioritised. Not everything can be monitored due to cost and capacity constraints.

Dignitas is Kenyan organisation that empowers educators and school leaders to transform opportunities for the next generation through school partnerships that strengthen leadership, improve instructional quality, and provide infrastructural support.

LEADNOW APP

Dignitas is one of the Global Schools Forum Impact@Scale Labs finalists.

https://www.globalschoolsforum.org/page/Dignitas

Dignitas' **LeadNow app** is a tech tool to support remote coaching of school leaders and enhance school-based teacher development in Kenya.

This app is embedded in Dignitas' digital training and coaching toolkit LeadNow, designed for and by School Leaders.

It was developed in 2021 and has undergone initial testing with approximately 800 school leaders.

Dignitas intends to reach 4,150 schools, targeting a total of 16,600 educators. Their goal is to impact the education of 750,000 children through direct school partnerships and 1,500,000 through government collaboration by 2027. This app was developed to help reach this goal.

Problem statement

Key Inputs & Activities

Mechanisms for change

Outputs

Mechanisms for change

Outcomes

Goals

Long-term goals

Few solutions exist for leaders to aid teachers lacking skills in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) instruction.

Train Instructional Leaders in three FLN pedagogical methods: formative assessment, data-driven, and differentiated instruction.

Offer how-to guides for strategy implementation.

Provide SBL Scenarios for practical strategy application.

Supply Reflective Journals to help leaders identify strengths, growth areas, and enhance teacher support.

Enable Instructional Leaders to set goals to boost teacher support and present feedback to guide goal setting and improve teacher support.

LeadNow offers evidence-based pedagogical approaches for impactful FLN, addresses knowledge gaps in instructional practices, provides contextually relevant strategies and resources, enables leaders to practice learned skills, delivers engaging content with videos and animations, and ensures timely, personalized, high-quality feedback for reflection and goal-setting

Instructional Leaders are enthusiastic about enhancing FLN skills and exhibit strong self-efficacy in applying learned concepts.

They possess expertise in formative assessments, data-driven, and differentiated instruction.

They possess expertise in formative assessments, data-driven, and differentiated instruction.

Instructional Leaders support teachers in using different methods to check for understanding during lessons

Instructional Leaders review and use teaching and learning data to inform necessary adjustments to teaching and learning processes

Instructional Leaders support teachers to tailor instruction to meet the learning needs, learning types and abilities of learners

Instructional Leader's support utilizes teacher lesson observations for feedback, models expectations on formative assessments, data-driven instruction, and differentiated instruction, and builds upon past coaching records to guide future actions and goals.

There is improved pedagogical support to teachers on formative assessments, data driven instruction and differentiated instruction

Teachers will differentiate instruction to accommodate the learning needs, different learner types and abilities

Teachers will review and use learner data to adjust teaching processes

Teachers will apply different methods to check for understanding during lessons

There is improved instruction for FLN

Accountability Line

There are improved learning outcomes for FLN

Critical/enabling factors

Instructional Leaders and teachers are motivated to enhance FLN practices

Leaders have smartphone and internet access.

Leaders, teachers, and stakeholders like Education Officers collaborate.

Leaders and teachers allocate time for skill practice.

Adequate funding and partnerships support LeadNow's scaling.

11

MEL FRAMEWORK EXAMPLE

This provides a small snapshot of a MEL framework, adapted from the Dignitas MEL framework:

Theory of Change	Monitoring Questions	Purpose / Rationale	Success Criteria	Data Sources	Indicators	Timing / Frequency	Owner
Link to the TA's ToC	*What do we want to reflect upon?*	*Why are we asking this question?*	*What are we aiming for? What does 'success' look like in this area?*	*Where will we look for data/information that helps us answer the question?*	*Precisely what will we look at, within the data sources? The indicators may be qualitative but should be measurable*	*How often should this data be collected?*	*Who is responsible for collecting and/or analysing this data?*
Output — Instructional Leaders are enthusiastic about enhancing FLN skills…	To what extent do instructional leaders exhibit positive attitudes towards learning FLN skills?	To understand whether the app's content and learning are positively received by leaders.	The great majority of leaders show positive attitudes towards learning skills for improving FLN.	Survey	Average proportion of leaders showing positive attitudes on survey items related to learning FLN skills and concepts.	- Halfway through the programme - At the end of the programme	{add name or team}
Outcome — Teachers will review and use learner data to adjust teaching processes	To what extent do teachers use learner data to adjust teaching processes?	To assess whether the app leads to behaviour changes in teachers' practices around assessment-informed practices.	Following the programme, at least 25% of teachers display assessment-informed practices and this increases over six months.	Observations	Average proportion of teachers who use learner data to adjust their practice.	- At the start of the programme - 2-3 months after the programme - 6 months after the programme	{add name or team}

GLOBAL SCHOOLS FORUM

The MEL tool has **five tabs.** Together, these tabs present the moving pieces of a MEL framework that can come together to help you measure and understand your programme.

1. Introduction
This first tab is a guidance tab and provides an overview of the purpose, structure and components of this tool. There is no action for you to complete here, other than reading through it.

Purpose of this document

This is a framework and database meant to guide the monitoring of Dignitas's LeadNow App.

What are the goals of monitoring?

1 **Deliver a better project**
Good monitoring can directly improve the delivery of a project. At its best, monitoring serves as a feedback loop that directly informs decision-making throughout a project. It is not an activity done in parallel to programme delivery, it is part of delivery itself.
Monitoring can do this by creating formal checkpoints for the team to pause, pay attention to key questions, collect information and have conversations in answer to those questions, and then make programmatic course corrections as a result. Each monitoring question should have a clear purpose that the team thinks will help them achieve the objectives of the project. Monitoring should not just become a box-ticking exercise that consumes scarce time.

2 **Learning**
Monitoring can lead to multiple kinds of learning. Monitoring questions can push the team to examine their work more closely, and therefore help the team learn whether a certain approach is working. Monitoring data can feed into evaluation exercises of the project.

3 **Accountability**
Any reporting requirements should be kept in mind when designing the monitoring database so that the data captured in response to the monitoring questions will facilitate reporting.

Components of this document

1 **Introduction**

| 1. Intro | 2. Overarching Questions & ToC | 3. Monitoring Universe | 4. Monitoring Plan | 5. Data Sources | + |

2. Overarching Questions and ToC

The second tab in the document presents the **high-level (overarching) questions** that underpin each of the main sections of the theory of change (i.e. input/resources, activities, outputs, outcomes, enablers/critical factors).

These overarching questions are common across all monitoring frameworks and are meant to guide the development of your more specific monitoring questions that will require specific data to answer.

This tab is also a good place for you to paste in your **theory of change**, for easy access and reference.

Overarching monitoring questions	Input / resources	Activities	Ouputs	Outcomes	Goals	Critical factors / enablers
Is the workplan realistic in terms of budget and staff time?	✓					
Are activities happening as planned?		✓				
Are activities leading to the expected outputs?		✓	✓			
Are activities leading to the expected outcomes?		✓		✓		
Are the short-term outcomes leading to the expected goals?				✓	✓	
Are the enabling factors in place? Are there derailing factors?						✓
How does the changing context affect our workplan? Should the workplan be changed according to changes in context?						✓

USING THE TOOL

GLOBAL SCHOOLS FORUM
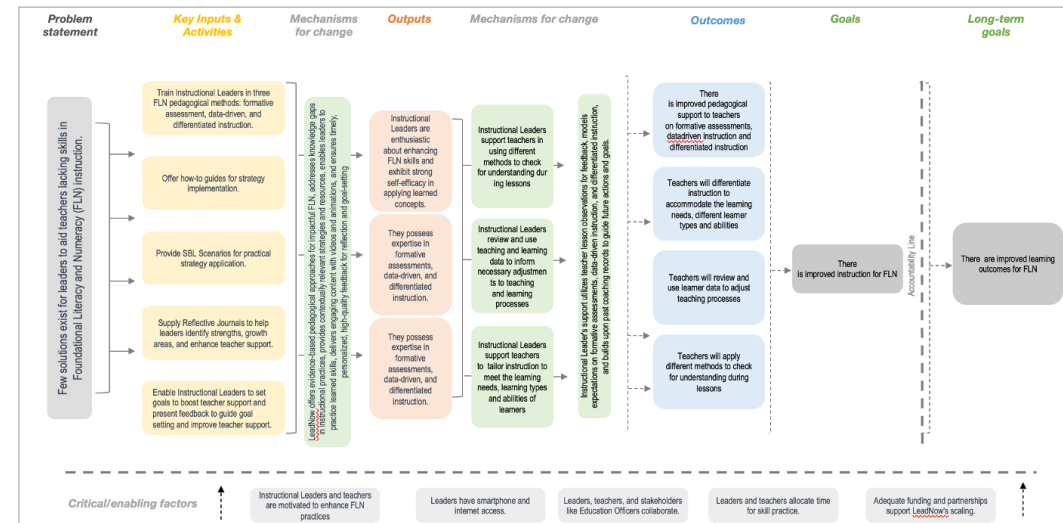
3. Monitoring universe

The third tab in the document presents a **systematic and comprehensive breakdown of the universe of the possible monitoring questions and data sources** that could in theory be targeted by the monitoring to probe each of the components of the theory of change (to the left of the accountability line) and potentially guide implementation adaptations and inform evaluation of impact.

Include all the questions that come to your mind. You may want to engage other team members in this exercise. We will narrow down the questions later in the exercise.

	Theory of Change	Monitoring Questions	Purpose / Rationale	Success Criteria	Data Sources	Indicators	Timing / Frequency
Overarching Questions	Add all statements from the theory of change (excluding the goals beyond the accountability line)	What do we want to reflect upon?	Why are we asking this question?	What are we aiming for? What does 'success' look like in this area?	Where will we look for data/information that helps us answer the question? *What is useful, realistic, and within budget?*	Precisely what will we look at, within the data sources?	How often should this data be collec
Activities							
Are activities happening as planned?							
Mechanisms for Change							
activities pening as nned?							

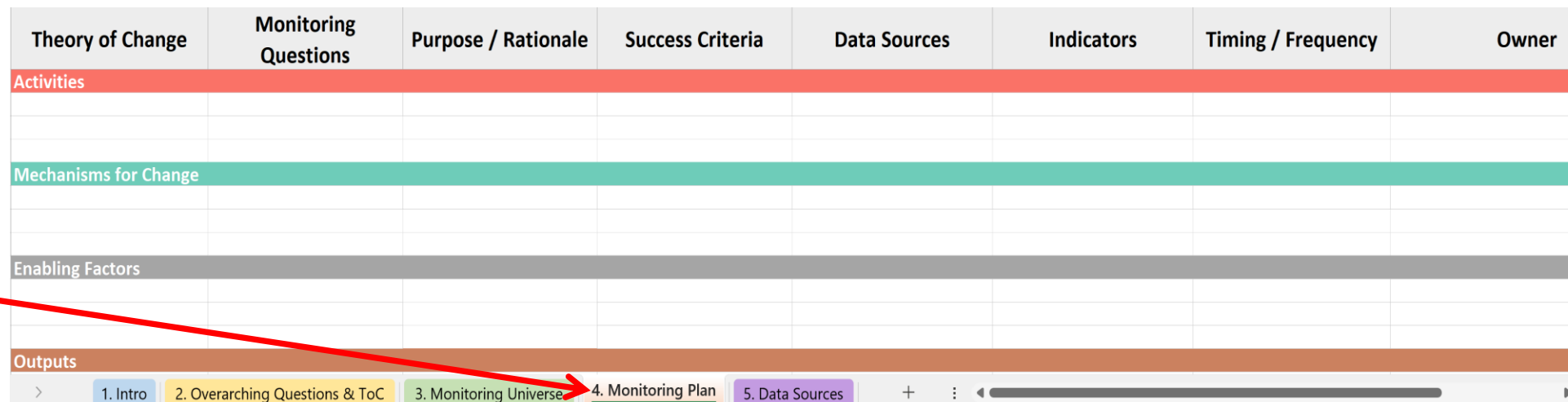1. Intro   2. Overarching Questions & ToC   3. Monitoring Universe   4. Monitoring Plan   5. Data Sources

4. Monitoring plan

The fourth tab in the document consists of the monitoring plan and can also be used as a **database** for the project.

The monitoring plan specifies for each monitoring question: the **rationale**, the **success criteria**, the **data sources**, the **indicators**, the **timing / frequency**, and the **owner**.

It is often not possible or practical to pursue all the monitoring questions, so strategic decision must be made regarding the key questions that will be the focus of the monitoring activities. This tab will thus contain only the prioritised questions selected from the monitoring universe and will be the focus of all monitoring activities. These decisions will be based on:

1. Your strategic priorities
2. Your reporting needs
3. Your available resources, including existing data sources
4. Practical / feasibility considerations

Theory of Change	Monitoring Questions	Purpose / Rationale	Success Criteria	Data Sources	Indicators	Timing / Frequency	Owner
Activities							
Mechanisms for Change							
Enabling Factors							
Outputs							

1. Intro   2. Overarching Questions & ToC   3. Monitoring Universe   4. Monitoring Plan   5. Data Sources   +
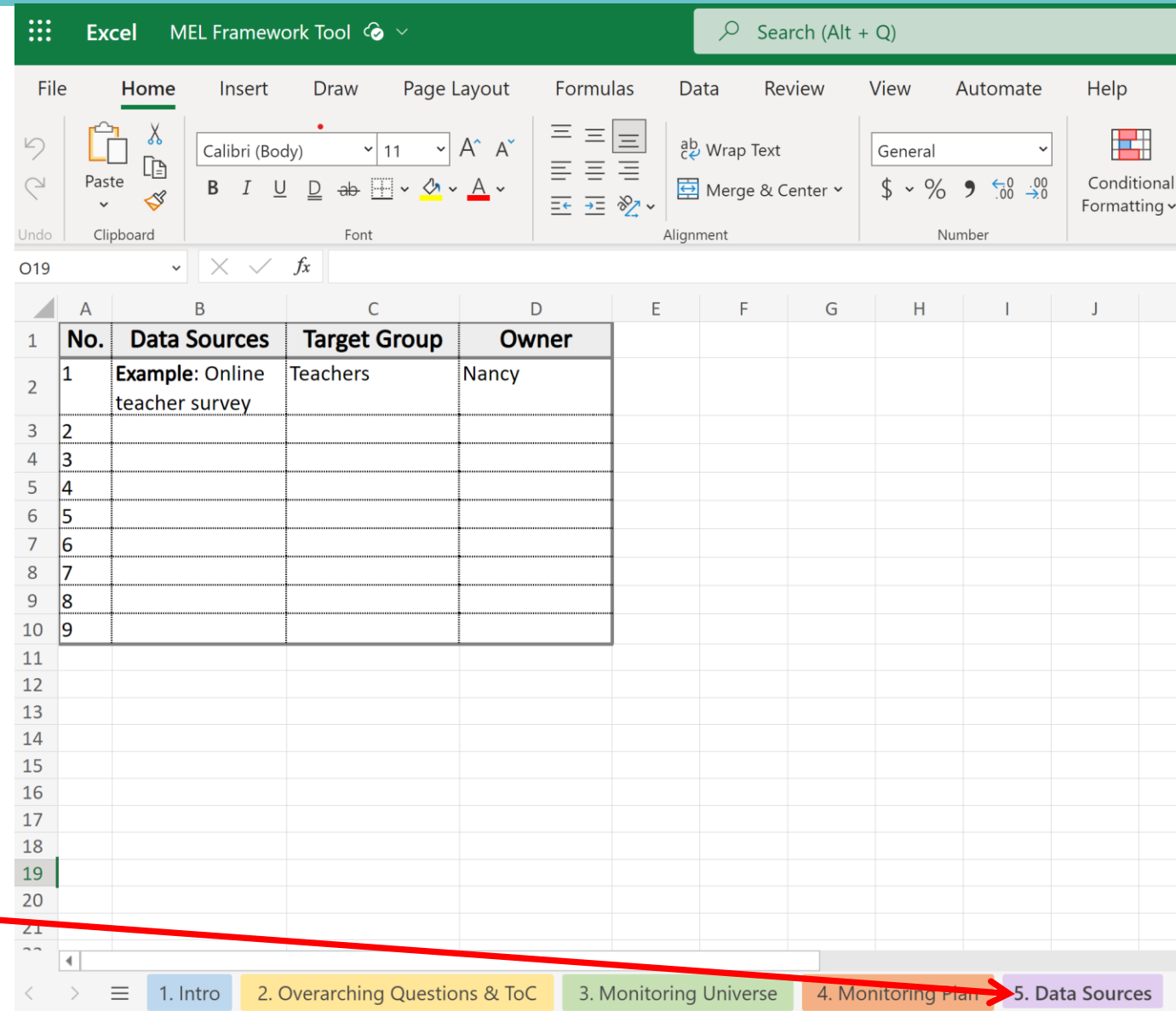
GLOBAL SCHOOLS FORUM

5. Data Sources

The final tab contains the list of all data sources in your Monitoring Plan (tab 4) and the target group for these data sources.

You may already have these data sources in place, or you may need to develop new data collection mechanisms.

It is useful to identify a person (owner) who will be responsible for developing and overseeing these data sources.

No.	Data Sources	Target Group	Owner
1	**Example:** Online teacher survey	Teachers	Nancy
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Framework

Scale Toolkit

The contents and templates included in this toolkit were developed in collaboration with Better Purpose. For more information, please visit www.betterpurpose.co

Collaborate. Innovate. Educate.

GLOBAL SCHOOLS FORUM